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AUTHOR Wilbur, Leslie; Sheldon, M. Stephen
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to compare the job expectations of community college trustees in California before they were first elected or appointed with their perceptions of the realities of trustee service. Questionnaires were sent to the chief executive officers at each community college district in the state for distribution to the trustees. Study findings, based on responses from 247 or 47% of the state's 527 community college trustees, included the following: (1) 68% of the trustees were men, 53% were over 55 years of age, and 47.6% had served from 6 to 16 years; (2) with respect to their aspirations in running for the board of trustees, 95.1% wanted to serve the community, 45% wanted to improve district efficiency, and 44% wanted to improve district management; (3) 28% had expected to encounter no personal expenses as a trustee, 37.1% had expected expenses of less than $500 per year, 14.3% had expected between $500 and $1,000 in expenses, while 21% expected expenses of more than $1,000 per year; (4) two-thirds of the trustees had expenses equal to their expectations, while the most commonly cited unexpected expense was that of social activities; (5) before assuming the trusteeship, 50% expected to spend 5 hours per week on trustee affairs; however, after assuming the trusteeship, 38.4% estimated that they spent 5 hours or less each week on trustee service, 41.7% spent 6 to 10 hours, and 20% spent more than 11 hours; and (6) the trustees expressed most interest in planning and goal setting, with board meetings running a close second. (AAC)

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ON CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES: EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES

REPORT NUMBER THREE

Leslie Wilbur

M. Stephen Sheldon

University of Southern California
School of Education

February 28, 1989

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ON CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES: EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES

REPORT NUMBER THREE

Leslie Wilbur and M. Stephen Sheldon
School of Education
University of Southern California

Introduction

This is our third and final report about California Community Colleges trustees. The first report was based on data from all 70 districts and described the demographic and vocational variables of the trustees. It also sought information as to the political support for their election to the board. The major conclusion was that the greatest single current influence on the trustee elections was that of the teachers' unions, and to a lesser extent, by unions representing non-academic employees of colleges.

The second report, based on data from 67 districts, concentrated on the economics of supporting 70 separate boards of trustees and scores of separate collective bargaining units in California. The report listed the aggregate costs associated with separate district trustee elections and collective bargaining and found them substantial. Noting that those costs were paid for primarily with state funds, we suggested they might not be defensible for many more years. It seemed that if local control were to be maintained over **educational** decisions, districts should seriously consider some remedial actions.

For the first and second reports the data were collected from the offices of the district chief executive officers (CEOs). For this, the third report, the data are based on questionnaires

returned by the trustees themselves. Our questionnaire study probed the trustees' expectations about their service before the first time they were elected or appointed and compared those expectations with the realities of trustee service for a California community college. We were also interested in comparing the expectations with the perceptions of reality of those trustees who had served for a long period with those who had been trustees a relatively short time. Our report describes the methods used to collect and analyze the data, the results that were achieved in both tabular and prose form, and the conclusions we feel we can draw from this and the previous two studies of the California Community College trustees.

Methods

The Questionnaire:

A draft questionnaire was prepared to tap the expectations of the trustees before their first service and their current perceptions of their service after having served as a trustee. Some questions asked the respondents to think back to their first trustee election, or when they were first appointed and to report how they perceived the job of community college trustee, what they expected and how tough they found the campaign. A parallel set of questions asked what they found the realities of the job of trustee to be and the kinds of things that they found to be of most interest.

We submitted copies of the draft to three "expert" judges in the field of community college trustees for review. The panel included district CEOs. All judges preferred to remain anonymous. The suggestions made by the panel were incorporated into the survey

form.

Sampling:

Copies of the survey were sent to all district CEOs in sufficient numbers to be distributed to each trustee in the district. The student members of the boards were intentionally omitted. Explanatory letters for the CEO and the trustees were included with the packet of questionnaires, as were self-addressed, stamped return envelopes.

Aware that CEOs and trustees are deluged with requests for information, we compressed the length of our questionnaire to fit on two sides of a single 8.5x11 sheet of paper. Our brevity was rewarded; we received a large return.

The Sample:

Of the 527 community college trustees in this state, 247 or about 47% chose to fill out the survey form and return it. As will be apparent from the results section, not all respondents answered all of the questions. Of the 70 community college districts in the state 67 were represented in the sample and 53 districts are represented by three or more trustees. We checked the representativeness of this sample by comparing it demographically with the data from our first report. Though this is a self-selected sample, we see no reason to suspect a systematic bias.

Data Analyses:

As the returned questionnaires were received, each was assigned a reference number. All of the scaled items were recorded in a computerized data set resulting in 43 variables. Using the entire sample, we computed frequency distributions and basic

statistics for all the variables for which the calculations had meaning.

Two subsets of the total sample of trustees were identified: those who reported that they had served three or fewer years, and those who reported that they had served for 15 or more years. The differences between these subsets on relevant variables were examined. To determine the significance of the differences on scaled variables such as the amount of interest in various trustee activities, t-ratios were calculated.

It was more difficult to determine if the subsets of long and short term trustees were different on open ended questions than on objective questions. There were 48 usable returns from trustees who had served 15 years or more and 52 who had served three or fewer years. For this analysis a random half of each of the subsets was taken by each of the authors of this paper to be used as a working sample.

Both of us scrutinized the answers of the short and long term trustees on three questions trying to determine what kinds of responses differentiated between them. The questions, all on side two of the survey, were: What sacrifices do you feel you have made to serve as a trustee? What have you gained from your service as a trustee? What advice would you give a person considering running for a community college district board? We looked only at the random half of the surveys that had been assigned to us. After much scrutiny, study and several conferences discussing and sharing our findings, hunches, and intuition about how the subsamples differed, we exchanged samples. Without referring to side one of

the survey we each tried to determine whether each survey was from a long or short term trustee. Said another way, the working sample of one author became the "hold-out" or cross-validation sample for the other.

Results

Demographic and Factual Data:

The first series of questions dealt with background data. These general data about the trustees, as represented by the sample, are summarized below:

A. Sex - 68% Male; 32% female

B. Age - 2% under 35 years old

45% between 35-55 years old

53% over 55 years old

C. For 64%, this was their first elective office.

D. Length of Service as a Trustee - Table 1 shows a frequency distribution of the number of years the sample had served as a trustee. Their terms of service ranged from less than a year to thirty-one years. Approximately a third, (34.1) had served five years or less; approximately half (47.6%) had served from six to fifteen years. Less than twenty per cent (18.3) had served more than fifteen years.

Table 1. NUMBER OF YEARS A TRUSTEE	Number	Percent
00 = 04	67	27.3 %
05 = 09	81	33.1 %
10 = 14	44	18.0 %
15 = 19	29	11.8 %
20 = 24	13	5.3 %
25 = 29	7	2.9 %
30 = 35	4	1.6 %
Total	245	100.0 %

E. About equal percentages (46%, 44%) ran for office on their own initiative or ran because of friends' suggestions. The remainder (11%) were motivated by a combination of the two. Several were initially appointed rather than elected.

F. Politics of the Elections - Table 2 shows that the most recent trustee elections were contested. The largest group (45%) ran uncontested.
The smallest (23%) described their contests as vigorous.

Table 2. WAS YOUR LAST ELECTION CONTESTED?	Number	Percent
1 = UNCONTESTED	109	44.9 %
2 = MILDLY CONTESTED	78	32.1 %
3 = VIGOROUSLY CONTESTED	58	23.0 %
Total	245	100.0 %

G. Expenses of the Trustee Elections - The largest group (55%) spent less than $1,000 on their election. Of those, sixteen per cent said they had no expenses. Seventeen per cent spent from $1000 to $5,000; thirteen per cent more than $5,000.

Expectations and Aspirations:

A second group of questions dealt with the expectations of the trustees before they were elected or appointed to the board for the first time. For about forty per cent of the sample these questions required the recall of events and feelings that took place more than a decade ago. (See Table 1 above.)
A. Aspirations - Trustees were asked how they felt and what they thought they might accomplish before they ran for a place on the board. Six categories were listed with a place to describe "Others." Table 3 gives the results of that query.

Table 3. ASPIRATIONS IN RUNNING FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

	NUMBER	PERCENT
SERVE THE COMMUNITY	233	95.1%
REDUCE DISTRICT COSTS	43	17.6%
IMPROVE DISTRICT EFFICIENCY	111	45.3%
IMPROVE INSTRUCTION	98	40.0%
IMPROVE COLLEGE MANAGEMENT	109	44.0%
REPLACE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS	20	8.2%
OTHER	56	23.3%

B. Expected Workload - Second, they were asked how many hours a week they expected to spend on trustee affairs. Table 4 gives the results of that question. Half (50.1%) estimated five hours or less. Of the remainder, (39.1%) estimated from six to ten hours. Of those, more than half (22.7%) estimated ten hours specifically.

Table 4. EXPECTED WEEKLY HOURS WORK	Number	Percent
01 =	3	1.4 %
02 =	22	10.0 %
03 =	12	5.5 %
04 =	38	17.3 %
05 =	35	15.9 %
06 =	19	8.6 %
07 =	1	0.5 %
08 =	16	7.3 %
10 =	50	22.7 %
12 =	4	1.8 %
15 =	10	4.5 %
20 =	8	3.6 %
25 =	1	0.5 %
30 =	1	0.5 %
Total	220	100.0 %

C. Expected expenses - The trustees were asked to recall their expected expenses, i.e., how much they anticipated it would cost to serve as a trustee. For many of the long-term trustees, there was little or no compensation when they first started on the board. Pay, insurance, and other financial benefits are a rather recent development. More than a fourth (28%) had expected no expenses. Thirty seven percent (37.1%) had expected expenses less than $500.

About fourteen per cent (14.3%) had expected expenses between $500 and $1,000 per year. Only twenty-one per cent (20.6%) expected expenses of more than $1,000 per year. More detailed data on this question are given in Table 5.

Table 5. EXPECTED PERSONAL COSTS AS A TRUSTEE	Number	Percent
$00.000 =	49	28.0 %
100 =	20	11.4 %
200 =	10	5.7 %
300 =	11	6.3 %
400 =	4	2.3 %
500 =	20	11.4 %
600 =	1	0.6 %
1,000 =	24	13.7 %
1,200 =	5	2.9 %
1,500 =	2	1.1 %
1,800 =	1	0.6 %
2,000 =	8	4.6 %
2,500 =	3	1.7 %
3,000 =	2	1.1 %
3,100 =	1	0.6 %
4,500 =	1	0.6 %
5,000 =	6	3.4 %
6,000 =	2	1.1 %
7,500 =	1	0.6 %
10,000 or more =	4	2.3 %
Total	175	100.0 %

D. Advice - One question asked if the respondent had talked with trustees before deciding to run for the board. About two-thirds (62%) talked with trustees before deciding to run for office.

Realities of Board Life:

A third set of questions asked about the trustees' present reactions, i.e., what they felt now, what had been accomplished to date, and what interested them.

A. Accomplishments of Goals - We asked trustees about their feelings of accomplishment when they considered their goals. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. RATING OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE BOARD

	1. VERY WELL	2. MODERATELY WELL	3. NOT VERY WELL	MEAN
SERVICE TO COMMUNITY	169	63	3	1.3
REDUCTION IN DISTRICT COSTS	23	66	20	2.0
IMPROVED DISTRICT EFFICIENCY	56	85	10	1.7
IMPROVED INSTRUCTION	46	82	17	1.8
IMPROVED COLLEGE MANAGEMENT	77	64	12	1.6
BETTER ADMINISTRATORS	59	36	11	1.5
OTHER	32	24	4	1.5

B. Trustees were also asked to estimate the number of hours a week they spent on trustee affairs. Thirty-eight per cent (38.4) estimated five hours or less. Forty-two percent (41.7) estimated from six to ten hours (of that group more than half estimated ten). Almost twenty per cent (19.9) spent eleven or more hours (of that group almost half spent twenty or more hours). Table 7 gives more detailed data on that question.

Table 7. HOURS SPENT AS TRUSTEE WEEKLY	Number	Percent
01 - 02	18	7.6 %
03 - 04	47	19.8 %
05 - 06	46	19.4 %
07 - 08	26	11.0 %
09 - 10	53	22.3 %
11 - 12	10	4.2 %
13 - 14	1	0.4 %
15 - 16	15	6.3 %
17 - 18	0	0.0 %
19 - 20	11	4.6 %
25 - 40	10	4.2 %
Total	237	100.0 %

C. Only a third of the trustees felt there were unexpected expenses related to their services as trustees.

D. A substantial majority (86%) felt that district payments of their expenses were generally adequate.

E. We also asked trustees to rate their interests in the various activities associated with serving as a trustee. The results are

expressed in percentages in Table 8, page 10.

Table 8. Trustee Interest in Various Governance Topics

	High Interest	Moderate Interest	Little Interest	Mean
Planning and goal setting	194	47	2	1.2
Evaluation of the college(s)	133	94	15	1.5
Education policy	172	63	7	1.3
Personnel matters	105	113	4	1.7
Budget	156	82	6	1.4
Community relations	167	71	6	1.3
Faculty relations	146	93	4	1.4
Staff relations	145	90	8	1.4
Administrative relations	162	75	6	1.4
Student relations	127	105	11	1.5
Preparation for board mtgs.	164	73	5	1.3
Board meetings	192	49	3	1.2
Statewide trustee activities	59	104	81	2.1

F. We asked all respondents if they would encourage others to run for the board. The vote was an overwhelming affirmative: 236 Yes: 9 No.

G. The comparison between the short and long term trustees resulted in no significant differences. We designed and applied elaborate procedures to compare objectively these two groups. Contrary to our expectations, we found no differences on the qualitative or subjective questions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

"Before" and "After" compared

In general, trustees' achievements met their expectations. Using a Likert-type scale that ran from "very well" to "not very well," we found that trustees were relatively satisfied with what they had accomplished.

A. They felt that their highest expectation, that of serving the community, was accomplished very well (72%). Only one percent of

the trustees felt that goal was not very well achieved.

They perceived themselves as least effective (18% "not very well") in reducing district costs. However, their expectations (18%) were relatively modest in that area.

B. Their estimates of the hours required for trustee service were exceeded by reality. The half of the trustees who had estimated five hours per week shrank to less than forty per cent "after." The percentages who indicated five to ten hours per week remained comparable (39.1%, 41.7%). The percentage who replied that trustee service required more than ten hours per week approximately doubled.

C. Trustee expenses turned out to be about as expected for two-thirds of the trustees. The most commonly expressed surprise was that of substantially more social activities, which required unaccustomed expenditures.

Despite some comments about unexpected expenses, the general feeling of trustees was that they were adequately compensated for them.

Sacrifices amd Benefits

The highest interest of trustees was in planning and goal setting; board meetings ran a very close second. Five other areas drew especially high interest: Education policy, preparation for board meetings, community relations, administrative relations, and budget. The trustees expressed their lowest interest in statewide trustee's activities.

When asked what sacrifices they had made to serve as trustees they answered most frequently "time." Their time was taken from activities with families and friends and often from business

affairs.

Another sacrifice mentioned was that of energy. In addition to time, substantial amounts of effort had to be devoted to the activities related to trustee duties. Preparation and board meetings required a lot of homework. Reading was not only voluminous; it was also tedious and dull, but essential for effective service as a trustee.

One theme that also emerged was that of having to endure some loss of popularity. In addition there was the perception of occasional prejudice directed toward the trustee or members of the trustee's family.

In general the rewards to service as a trustee were mentioned more frequently and with more vigor than were the sacrifices. Satisfaction with the college was mentioned most frequently. Appreciation of self-fulfillment and expansion of knowledge were also often mentioned.

Wider and better association with the community was also mentioned as one of the compensations. In addition, personal growth and status were felt to be enhanced by their service.

Another theme that emerged was that of learning in the areas of management and financial affairs. Related benefits were those of learning more about politics at state as well as local level.

Trustee Advice and Values

An overwhelming majority of trustees (96.3%) would encourage others to run for trustee.

We asked trustees what advice they would give to someone considering running for trustee. Responses ranged from none to "Go

for it" to several pages of discussion of the nature of the role. In order to make that wide variety coherent and useful, we identified what we felt were consistent, major themes of advice. We list them in order of frequency.

1. Be prepared to give, especially time.
2. Listen to your community, and make that community inclusive.
3. Attend trustee meetings (up to a year) before running.
4. Enjoy people and working for and with them.
5. Do your homework.
6. Don't try to administer; Confine your activities to policy.

We found contrasts between trustees' expectations and realities, especially in estimation of time requirements, but not as great as we had expected. It seems that trustees in general are neither overwhelmed nor bitter about the demands of trusteeship.

We were impressed by the consistently positive attitudes expressed by trustees when they commented on the rewards as well as the demands of trusteeship.

We had expected a substantial contrast between the attitudes of new trustees and those who had served for many years. We found instead that they shared many perceptions and gave remarkably similar advice.

We were impressed with the frequency and consistency of comments from trustees who felt grateful not only for an opportunity to serve their college and their community but who also felt their service gave them invaluable opportunities for growth and learning.

Postscript

During the past four years we have collected and analyzed three sets of data that dealt with the trustees of California Community Colleges. We brought with us to that analysis more than fifty years of experience in postsecondary education and a deep respect for the missions and accomplishments of community colleges. One outcome of our research and our backgrounds is a willingness to extrapolate beyond our data -- to speculate about what might be best for the system of community colleges in this state.

In our first paper the most important finding we reported was that faculty unions were, by far, the most frequent source of support for trustee election. Now we see the potential for an increasing number of trustee elections being controlled by collective bargaining units. This control has occurred in small, rural districts such as Antelope Valley, large suburban districts such as Coast, and multi-college, urban districts such as Peralta, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

The takeovers of the board follow a pattern in these districts. First the collective bargaining agency identifies those trustees with whom it has an adversarial relationship. Then opposition candidates are identified and supported with both campaign funds and precinct work performed by the union activists. Since the trustee elections often attract a small proportion of the voters, (less than 15% in the most recent Los Angeles District election) a little help goes a long way. A corroborating finding from this first study was that the modal profession of the trustees, both active and retired, was in education, and primarily

in teaching.

It seems logical that trustees elected through faculty organization support are under an obligation to give a high priority to their supporters' agenda. This is not to suggest a positive knee jerk reflex from a trustee. Most trustees in the state are not so easily manipulated by any special interest group. Nevertheless in recent years there is clearly inordinate employee pressure on trustees, whose historical role has been to represent the lay community rather than the academic constituency.

State law prohibits an employee of a district from serving as a trustee of the district in which he or she works, but not in the district in which he or she resides. However it seems to us there still may be potential conflicts of interest, for example, if sensitive information can be exchanged between boards of different districts which include union supported members.

In our second paper we reported the biggest expenses in maintaining 70 independent and individual community college districts were incurred by trustee elections and funds allocated for collective bargaining. Trustee salaries, insurance policies, and retirement benefits add to the cost of maintaining local control over the administrative aspects of community college districts. We estimate that it costs about $8,000,000 a year for local control, which seems somewhat misnamed, because most of the money comes from Sacramento. Few of these expenses have anything to do with local control of the curriculum or educational policies.

We believe that the most positive finding of this, our third report, is the genuine altruism expressed by the vast majority of

trustees. Most of the present trustees want to help their colleges and identify closely with their role of community college trustee.

As a consequence of these findings we recommend the consideration of two substantive changes in the governance and financial policies of the California Community Colleges. We recognize that recent legislative changes in funding policies have already been introduced.

1. Statewide expenditures for individual district to carry out collective bargaining were estimated to cost more than 1.6 millions of dollars annually. We are no longer persuaded that community college faculty salaries need to differ among districts. A statewide salary schedule established by means similar to those of the other two segments of public higher education might provide greater advantages than the scores of contracts presently negotiated. Therefore we suggest that the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges question seriously the need for seventy separate district employment contracts.

2. With the legislative changes that have occurred in community college funding and governance, it is evident that the Board of Governors makes the overall administrative policy decisions for the state. Therefore, a plan should be adopted so that each college, not district, may benefit from a local board of trustees who serve to guide **educational and curricular** policy, not governance. This board should serve without pay, insurance, or any compensation other than expenses. These local boards of trustees would not need be elected but might, for example, be appointed by a special committee with the "advise and consent" privileges going to the

faculty senate.

If adopted, these two recommendations would do a great deal to make the community colleges parallel to the other two major segments of California's public postsecondary education. We are aware that our suggestions are simple, though not simplistic, proposals for extremely complex problems. Nevertheless, we feel that we have a responsibility to share our ideas because they are based on extensive study and data collection. We have an additional advantage in that we are affiliated with an independent institution and have little to gain or lose from the acceptance, rejection, or modification of our recommendations.

L. Wilbur
S. Sheldon

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